

United Nations

Press Release

Department of Public Information • News Coverage Service • New York

Special Committee on
decolonization
1368th Meeting (PM)

GA/COL/2765
9 August 1990

**PETITIONERS IN DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE AGAIN CALL FOR PEOPLE OF EAST TIMOR
TO FREELY DETERMINE THEIR POLITICAL FUTURE**

Calls by petitioners for the right of the people of East Timor to freely determine their political future were again made this afternoon as the Special Committee on decolonization concluded its day-long consideration of the situation in the Territory which was occupied by Indonesia in 1975 and eventually annexed as its twenty-seventh province.

The representative of Indonesia said the Territory had made great strides and that allegations made by petitioners before the Special Committee were not true.

The representative of Portugal, the former administering Power, said his Government was ready to participate in efforts by the Secretary-General to achieve a negotiated settlement of the question, but that a climate conducive to the talks -- in the form of respect for human rights -- must prevail.

Statements were made by petitioners from the following bodies: Pax Christi International; Revolutionary Front for the Independence of East Timor (FRETILIN); Parliamentarians for East Timor, Australia; the Free East Timor Japan Coalition; the All-Party Forum on East Timor of the Japanese Diet; Canadian Parliamentarians for East Timor; the Special Committee for the Situation in East Timor of the Portuguese Parliament (one member each of the Social Democratic Party, the Socialist Party and the Democratic Renovation Party); the Commission for the Rights of Maubere People; and the Timorese Democratic Union.

When the Special Committee meets next on Monday, 13 August, it is expected to take up the questions of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) and New Caledonia.

(more).

Work Programme

The Special Committee on decolonization meets this afternoon to continue hearing petitioners on the question of East Timor.

Sister MARY BETH REISSEN, of Pax Christi International, said her organization viewed the 100,000 deaths, the least number estimated, in East Timor since the Indonesian invasion of 1975 as genocide. The people of East Timor continued to endure a war situation, a severe repression where their basic human rights and fundamental freedoms were gravely and daily violated. Her organization, she continued, deplored the summary executions of East Timorese, arbitrary arrests and detentions, disappearances, torture, forced sterilizations, resettlements and conscription into the Indonesian army. It decried the violation of fundamental freedoms, particularly those of speech, assembly and movement of the Timorese.

She said Pax Christi International had repeatedly called on United Nations bodies to act to ensure the cessation of massacres in East Timor. It called for the application of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the sorely persecuted people of East Timor, an end to all Indonesian military operations in the Territory, the withdrawal of Indonesian populations sent to East Timor, the end of all resettlement programmes for East Timorese and the opening of the entire Territory to humanitarian assistance organizations and international human rights organizations. She said Pax Christi International urged the dispatch of a visiting mission of the Special Committee to East Timor to meet with Bishop Filipe Belo, Apostolic Administrator of Dili, and other East Timorese leaders to recommend to the General Assembly the most suitable steps to be taken to enable the population to exercise their right to self-determination and independence, as stated in General Assembly resolution 44/101.

She called attention, she said, to the world-wide public campaign in support of Bishop Belo's petition for a referendum in East Timor. To date, the campaign had received the signatures of some 270 members of the Catholic hierarchy, more than 100 Christian movements and organizations and more than 4,000 individuals from 50 countries. They had received information contradicting a report to the Special Committee that the Catholic Church operated freely in East Timor. No Catholic youth organizations were permitted in the Territory and foreign priests stationed there had difficulties having their visas renewed. No foreign missionaries, unless they were Indonesian, might enter East Timor. The administration and faculty of San Jose School in Dili were experiencing pressures, inquiries and intimidations from the Indonesian authorities. East Timorese priests continued to be interrogated.

Furthermore, Pax Christi International was gravely concerned about the personal safety of Bishop Belo, she said. There was an urgent need to guarantee freedom of expression for the Catholic Church in East Timor and to end intimidation.

JOSE LUIS GUTERRES, member of Central Committee of the Revolutionary Front for the Independence of East Timor (FRETILIN), said that nearly 15 years

(more)

ago East Timor, a small island Territory, was invaded by a powerful and big neighbour. On 22 December 1975, the Security Council unanimously demanded that the Indonesian Government withdraw without any delay all its forces from the Territory; yet, after nearly 15 years of terror and massacre, during which approximately one third of its people had died, Indonesian military and security forces, he continued, still occupied East Timor.

Over the past year, the victories of Timor National Army and the new international situation had encouraged the young generation in East Timor and Indonesia to demonstrate peacefully against foreign occupation, and military resistance operations took place all over the country, during this year. During a visit of the United States Ambassador to Indonesia, hundreds of students had demonstrated for three days; on the last day, military repression injured 60 people, he said.

Today, he continued, another military operation was taking place involving about 40,000 troops located chiefly in the eastern part of East Timor. Indonesia had forcefully recruited 6,000 Timorese as auxiliary troops to help the Indonesian army in that operation. Indonesian military authorities were destroying the forests and also schoolchildren were trained to spy for Indonesia; prizes were offered to those who denounced their own families. In all, the human rights situation was worsening.

He said that in the light of the new international atmosphere, he appealed to Indonesia's military authorities to refrain from new operations, in order to facilitate understanding and dialogue between all concerned parties. The FRETILIN was prepared to enter into a dialogue with Indonesia without any pre-conditions and was also ready to participate in any referendum or election supervised by the United Nations. Finally, while he recognized the extreme importance of many oil multinationals in exploring natural resources, as well as contribution to the economic development of many countries, he appealed to all multinationals to refrain from exploring the oil resources in East Timor until a political settlement had been achieved.

LAURIE FERGUSON, of Parliamentarians for East Timor, Australia, speaking in an unofficial capacity, said concern for what had happened in East Timor, and support for a genuine act of self-determination by the Timorese people was shared by many of his colleagues, including members of the Australian Government. The struggle of the Timorese and their supporters had been a tiring and frustrating one. They were a small people up against their populous Indonesian captors. Additionally, they suffered from international apathy towards the plight of minor nations which lacked the strategic or economic importance to entice the interest of the major Powers.

However, it was a struggle that could not simply be abandoned for the sake of political expediency. The issue at stake, the right to self-determination was central, even indispensable, to the notion of a just and humane international order. That was the same issue Australian unionists, students and his Australian Labour Party called for during the Netherlands' efforts to thwart Indonesian independence. In the past 25 years, he continued, no former colonial people, no matter how small in number or how

(more)

undeveloped their territory, had been denied the right to exercise their choice about their future. Virtually all of them had chosen independence, protecting their cultural and economic rights, with the exception of the people of East Timor. He was not appealing for a special status for the Territory, but something that had been accorded as a sacred right to all colonial peoples.

Indonesia's contention that an act of self-determination had taken place in 1976 was simply untrue, he went on. As the call by Bishop Belo, East Timor's Catholic leader, had made clear in his appeal to the Secretary-General, Indonesia's Defence Minister, General Benny Murdani, who in fact planned and led the military annexation of East Timor in 1975, had arrogantly dismissed that appeal, stating in April this year, among other things, that Timorese should not "dream there will be a nation called Timor -- there won't be...".

He wished to remind the Committee that the tragedy of East Timor was not just about the question of self-determination. The brutal way in which the Territory had been seized, at the cost of more than 150,000 lives, compounded the seriousness of the violation of international law and human rights. He said senior Indonesian academics had reported that the overwhelming majority of Timorese people were strongly opposed to the oppressive Indonesian presence. There was a special concern with the steady inflow of transmigrants and others from elsewhere in Indonesia. The present situation in the Territory was of a people living in colonial conditions, a scenario that was an affront to the spirit of the Charter and a violation of universal human rights.

He would not speculate on what form the future state of East Timor might have, which was a matter for the Timorese themselves, and which might well be open to negotiation with Indonesia. What was not negotiable, however, was the right of the Timorese themselves to make the choice freely, in accordance with the spirit of the United Nations Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

JEAN INGLIS, of the Free East Timor Japan Coalition, said that 15 years ago, fully expecting East Timor to speedily achieve independence, the Japan-Timor Association had drawn up a \$300 million development project to be launched after independence was achieved. However, although East Timor did not want Indonesian rule, it was clear that Indonesia wanted East Timor, which it subsequently invaded. International public opinion had not prevented Indonesia from invading and Japanese public opinion had not prevented the Japanese Government's de facto support of the invasion. Now, 15 years later, the people of East Timor were still waiting for the opportunity to exercise their right of self-determination.

Since the Special Committee's session last August, reports had been received of demonstrations and arrests at the time of the Pope's visit in October; frequent pro-independence demonstrations by young people in the capital, Dili; and of a new Indonesian military offensive earlier this year. Such reports gave the unmistakable impression that the East Timorese continued

(more)

to be adamantly opposed to integration. The Free East Timor Japan Coalition believed that countries like Japan, which had a substantial flow of both trade and aid to Indonesia, should use that leverage to encourage Indonesia to enter negotiations towards a settlement that would guarantee to the East Timorese the right of self-determination.

YASUKO TAKEMURA, a member of the House of Councillors of the Japanese Diet, speaking for the 87 members of the all-party Diet Members Forum on East Timor in Japan, said she had taken up the issue of East Timor at the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs in the Diet last March. Regarding Japan's position on East Timor, she said a Foreign Ministry official had stated that the Government was observing the negotiations mediated by the United Nations Secretary-General. The Japanese Government had still not recognized the incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia. It had accepted what the Diet Members Forum had repeatedly claimed regarding the territorial integrity of East Timor, and had consequently showed a more serious and sincere attitude.

Her colleagues believed that representatives of the people of East Timor should be included in negotiations as they were the primary party involved, she went on to say. There had not been an improvement in the situation in East Timor. Reports they were receiving spoke of oppression and violence being inflicted upon the East Timorese by the occupying forces. Those reports also indicated that pro-independence actions by East Timorese would increase in the future and the United Nations should therefore make the utmost effort to speedily assure that voices calling for self-determination were reflected in negotiations towards a settlement.

As a woman, she said, she was deeply concerned about the family-planning programme being forcibly carried out in the Territory. She was fully aware of the importance of family planning in general but its implementation should be based on the spontaneous will of women. Their rights should be fully guaranteed.

She said Japan occupied East Timor for three and a half years during the Second World War and now had become the largest financial sponsor of the present occupier, Indonesia. The members of the Diet Members Forum on East Timor, together with citizens involved in the issue at the grass-roots level, deeply regretted Japan's invasion in the past. As they looked upon the suffering of the people of East Timor today, they were determined that "the same sin should not be repeated".

RAY FUNK, of the Canadian Parliamentarians for East Timor, said that since the invasion and occupation of East Timor by Indonesia on 7 December 1975, there had been reports of oppression and the abuse of human rights on an unimaginable scale, in which up to 200,000 of the 700,000 East Timorese had died. There had been reports of murder, torture, forced relocation, restriction of movement, detention without trial, and cultural and economic oppression aimed at obliterating the lifestyles of the indigenous peoples. The continuing armed and non-armed resistance of the Timorese was proof of their desire to determine their own destiny, yet that right had been denied to them in the most harsh and repressive manner.

(more)

Despite the scale of the tragedy, he said, too few people in the world were aware of what was occurring in East Timor. In the absence of pressure generated by humanitarian concerns and the role of international law, economic and geopolitical considerations had been allowed to take precedence over the human and political rights, and even the lives, of the East Timorese. In its tacit acceptance of the Indonesian occupation of East Timor, the Canadian Government had attempted to preserve its good relations with the Indonesian Government.

Further, Western Governments were generally only too happy to sell arms to Indonesia and to lend it money, he said. The Canadian experience had clearly demonstrated that policies aimed at imposing a way of life on indigenous peoples -- even when those policies were relatively humane and well-intentioned -- were largely doomed if they did not involve the active understanding, consent and participation of the indigenous peoples themselves. The affirmation of the rights of the East Timorese was an important step in recognizing the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples all over the world to some control over their own affairs.

He said recent press reports indicated that the Indonesian military had begun a campaign of repression and killing, aimed at intimidating the Timorese people before the visit of a group of Portuguese Parliamentarians this fall. It, therefore, behooved the Special Committee and the Members of the United Nations, including Canada, to work quickly to realize the withdrawal of Indonesian forces from East Timor, followed by a free, open referendum in which the East Timorese people could decide their own future.

A minimum programme of action leading to that objective might include the following: the granting of full, absolute and unconditional access to official and non-governmental human rights and humanitarian groups wishing to make independent evaluations of the Indonesian presence in East Timor; United Nations sponsorship of talks aimed at establishing a mechanism whereby the people of East Timor can freely express their will, including in those talks legitimate representatives of the people of East Timor, as well as of Indonesia and Portugal; and United Nations supervision of the decision-making process in East Timor to ensure that it is free, open and not subject to outside intimidation.

ANTONIO MARIA PEREIRA, a Social Democratic Party member of the Special Committee for the Situation in East Timor of the Portuguese Parliament, recalled last week's Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, noting its world-wide condemnation as well as the Security Council's call for Iraqi withdrawal and imposition of mandatory sanctions against it.

He said the Iraqi action was a "carbon-copy" of the Indonesian invasion of East Timor. The justifications and explanations put forward in the two cases were the same. The situations were also similar. The Security Council had adopted at the time of the Indonesian invasion in 1975, a resolution ordering Indonesia to withdraw its troops as it had done in the case of the Iraqi action. How had some countries looked benevolently on the Indonesian action but then condemned the Iraqi action? he asked. There was one

(more)

international law which should be applied and that was a condemnation of the Indonesian action and a demand for its withdrawal from East Timor.

The world was witnessing a movement towards democracy and respect for human rights which had begun in Portugal after the revolution and was spreading, he continued. Why was Indonesia out of step with that movement? He said the world must ensure that the genocide perpetrated by Indonesian troops in East Timor ceased. Indonesia must allow the Timorese people to exercise freely their right to self-determination. The struggle of the Timorese people was still going on 15 years after the Indonesian annexation of the Territory, an action not asked for by the people of the Territory. The Indonesian action was "intolerable" and should be ended.

RAUL FERNANDO SOUSELO DE BRITO, a Socialist Party member of the Special Committee for the Situation in East Timor of the Portuguese Parliament, said the invasion of East Timor in 1975 disrupted the process of decolonization which Portugal had set in motion. The General Assembly had rejected "the pseudo-act of integration", but East Timor was still a Non-Self-Governing Territory. In East Timor, the denial of the right to self-determination had led, he continued, to the violation of other human rights, including the genocide of nearly one third of the population, torture, summary executions, disappearances, arbitrary arrests, and violation of the right of privacy.

The Government of Portugal was holding talks with Indonesia, under the auspices of the United Nations Secretary-General, with the aim of finding a just solution to the problem of East Timor. He called strongly for conditions to be met to bring peace to East Timor.

RUI JOSE SANTOS SILVA, a Democratic Renovation Party member of the Portuguese Parliament, said that 16 years after Portugal's return to democracy, the aims of the military movement which granted freedom to the Portuguese people had still not been entirely fulfilled. After decolonization of all the Territories formerly under Portuguese administration, a small stain had clouded the entire process. Today, the Portuguese-speaking African countries could express themselves freely, were autonomous and their peoples decided their own destinies. Timor alone remained silenced in respect of a right which all peoples were entitled to -- that of choosing their future in total freedom, maintaining their history and deciding on their identity.

He said that in 1975 the people of Timor were silenced, and although their clamour was loud, the invader's gunfire muffled it. Their legitimate rights were violated, their lives taken and their future curtailed. He spoke of his two years in the Territory from 1973 to 1974 during which he had found the people courteous and friendly. The population was then about 600,000, a third of which was believed to have been killed by Indonesian troops after the occupation in 1975. In complete safety and without any difficulties, he had travelled through the entire Territory. He learned that the people of East Timor had their own identity, which they eagerly wished to maintain and which no oppressor would be able to destroy, no matter how invidious the methods he used.

(more)

Today, he went on, the liberation movements in East Timor were mostly composed of young men and women who, 15 years ago, as children, lived through moments of anguish and grew up in a climate of violence, repression and violation of their rights. The people of Timor refused to give up their identity and wanted to be free. It was the duty of the international community to safeguard that objective.

He said the testimony of refugees recently arrived in Portugal described scenes of torture, fatal beatings and mysterious disappearances. Freedom of speech and assembly were denied; the Timorese could not travel within their own Territory and if anyone dared to do so, they were made a prisoner, interrogated and tortured.

Portugal would remain bound by its responsibility, in accordance with international law and the provisions of the Portuguese fundamental law, which in its article 293 referred to the promotion and safeguarding of the right to self-determination and independence of East Timor. It did not wish to reoccupy the Territory, he went on to say, but only to allow the people of Timor to freely express their wishes on their future, in liberty.

HOSSEIN SHEIKH ZEINELDDIN (Iran) said the formal name of the body of water separating Iran and Iraq is the Persian Gulf. He asked that petitioners who had referred to it take note of that fact.

JOSE LUIS JESUS (Cape Verde), speaking also on behalf of Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Sao Tome and Principe, said the Special Committee offered hope to those under colonial occupation, including the people of East Timor. Those countries had consistently supported East Timor's right to choose its own destiny. Application of the principle of self-determination could not be based on questions of current national interest.

Since 1982, he continued, the Secretary-General had a mandate to undertake consultations with all concerned parties with a view to reaching an internationally acceptable solution to the question of East Timor; after nine years, a solution had still not been reached. He believed a peaceful solution could be worked out, in the interest of brotherhood and the well-being of the peoples of the region.

RUI QUARTIN-SANTOS (Portugal) said Portugal had striven to ensure that the people of East Timor freely exercised their inalienable rights to freedom and self-determination against the illegal action of a neighbouring Power, a former colony itself and a member of the Special Committee as well. Portugal was not engaged in any kind of dispute regarding the sovereignty over the Territory of East Timor, nor was it attempting to "put back the clock of history". Portuguese colonial rule on East Timor was over, but it was also its duty to do what it could to uphold the fundamental rights and freedoms of its people and to speak out in favour of its identity and cultural heritage.

(more)

He said "the illegal status quo" in East Timor had been presented throughout the years as a fait accompli with many attempts being made to render it more palatable to the international community.

He said he was not present to defend Portuguese colonial rule in East Timor, but he failed to understand why, up till very recently, the Territory had been virtually closed to the outside world, except for certain escorted visitors. Travel restrictions were, however, still imposed in the area where two thirds of the population lived. He wondered also, why with so impressive a record of progress, the free exercise of the right of self-determination was feared. It would certainly comfort Indonesia's stance on the question. Integration would then be the result of the genuine will of the East Timorese, and the relevant principles and resolutions of the United Nations would be duly observed. Claims that armed resistance was linked to a handful of individuals had been shown not to be the case. Instead of vanishing, opposition actions and demonstrations had been carried out recently by youngsters, who had never experienced anything but the present political situation.

He said a team of social scientists from a prestigious Indonesian university had in a report conveyed a disturbing picture of the situation in the Territory, referring to the continuation of a "war situation" and of a "war economy". East Timorese society was said to be still in a "trauma" and that "physical progress has failed to solve the social, economic and political problems resulting from the process of integration which caused quite heavy loss of life". The team was also quoted, he continued, as having pointed out that "where as the Indonesian Government considers that integration has resolved the matter of decolonization, East Timorese society does not see it in that light". Also, a special recommendation of the scientists called for the end of the so-called resettlement programme to allow people to return to their original villages.

He said Portugal firmly believed that East Timor, in its very particular situation, constituted one of the most serious cases ever to challenge the application of the decolonization principles of the General Assembly Declaration on decolonization. Portugal had been one the co-sponsors of General Assembly resolution 37/30 which entrusted to the Secretary-General a mandate to initiate consultations with parties concerned, aiming at exploring avenues for achieving a comprehensive settlement of the problem. It continued to believe that only through dialogue could confidence be built, and possible solutions thoroughly studied and analysed, taking duly into account all the legitimate interests involved.

Portugal would, as it had always done, co-operate with those efforts, he said. In that spirit, it was taking part in the talks that, under the auspices of the Secretary-General, have been held with the Indonesian representatives aiming at reaching agreement on the terms of reference, modalities and timing that would eventually allow a visit by a Portuguese Parliamentary delegation to East Timor to take place in the near future.

(more)

He reiterated that Portugal would do its utmost to contribute to the success of those talks. Significant progress had already been achieved and it earnestly hoped that the last remaining differences would rapidly be overcome to allow the visit to the Territory to take place as soon as possible. Portugal expected that the same spirit would prevail on the part of Indonesia, he added.

He went on to say it would also be a very positive factor to the endeavours and a powerful contribution to create a better atmosphere for dialogue if the respect for human rights and basic freedoms in East Timor showed clear signs of improvement. Unfortunately, that did not seem to be the case and he drew attention to a Secretariat working paper on the question (document A/AC.109/1037). Reports by the United States Department of State and Amnesty International had stated that serious human rights problems remained. Numerous detentions, temporary disappearances of people, torture and ill-treatment of prisoners were said to continue in the Territory. Worst of all, those reports had mentioned more than 20 civilians were killed by the military in 1989. He appealed to the Government of Indonesia to end such appalling practices and to investigate and punish those responsible for them.

He said the signing of a provisional agreement on the establishment of a "zone of co-operation" in the maritime area existing between East Timor and northern Australia, known as the "Timor Gap", constituted a serious and blatant breach of international law in contempt of the United Nations and of the rights of the people of East Timor, especially its permanent sovereignty over its natural resources. Portugal reserved the right to resort to any legal means it might deem appropriate to uphold the legitimate rights of the East Timorese.

ABDUL NASIER (Indonesia) said his delegation had already placed on record its objection to the deliberations on the so-called question of East Timor by the Special Committee or in any other forum; it considered such discussion to be unwarranted interference in Indonesia's internal affairs. The fictitious renditions of petitioners before the Committee did not truthfully reflect the real situation in East Timor, but represented a systematic smear campaign against Indonesia; he would not respond to their "contemptuous accusations".

He went on to say that East Timor became an integral part of Indonesia in July 1976 following the free and democratic exercise of the right to self-determination by the people of East Timor. Their decision to integrate with Indonesia was taken in conformity with United Nations resolutions, with the United Nations decolonization process. Having itself experienced several centuries of colonial oppression, Indonesia always empathised with the aspirations, hopes and plight of the people of East Timor. When they made the irrevocable decision to become independent through integration with Indonesia, their process of decolonization was completed, he said. Indonesia had been contributing to the process of decolonization of that Territory by helping to ensure that the democratically expressed will of the majority would "not be overruled by armed terror and the imposition of a few discontented voices bent on stirring up strife and disharmony".

(more)

Indonesia exerted continuous efforts towards the accelerated development of East Timor in the economic, political and social spheres and in the protection of East Timor's cultural and religious rights. Tremendous strides had been made in the development of agriculture, health, education, public housing, communications and the restoration of basic human rights. On 26 May of this year, seven mini earth stations, a direct digital international link and two telecommunications centres were inaugurated. In the area of education, illiteracy in East Timor had been reduced from 95 per cent in 1975 to 31 per cent at the end of 1988.

In the agricultural sector, he continued, an overall increase in the production of commodities and plantation acreage had resulted from improved intensified planting patterns and the hard work of the agricultural information officers in the province. To improve public health facilities and to promote disease prevention, the Government would build, during the Fourth Five-year Development Plan, clean water facilities in 125 villages. The qualitative and quantitative development of overland communication had greatly increased and air communications between Jakarta and East Timor were now serviced by daily scheduled flights.

He was convinced, he said, that Committee members would realize that East Timor was never a closed area to which access was forbidden, and that the active and participatory role of its people in rebuilding their own province was hardly evidence of a lack of human rights or any slightest form of human oppression. Recent positive developments in East Timor included, he said, the replacement of six battalions of the armed forces of East Timor by two new battalions specifically assigned to civic missions -- for example, to work together with the local people in development projects such as agriculture, building of infrastructures in villages and in building houses of worship.

The recent visit of Pope John Paul II to East Timor during his pastoral visit to Indonesia was conducted amidst much joy and happiness, despite a brief interruption by a very few demonstrators, he stated, and any allegations of chaos or human oppression were wholly untrue.

He said that for 14 years, the Special Committee had heard the same kind of accusations and slander directed against Indonesia; the petitioners who made such allegations had no real concern for the well-being of the East Timorese people and did not represent the majority of people in East Timor. Indonesia remained committed to the people of East Timor and to promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms by developing East Timor politically, economically, socially and culturally. The deliberation of the question of East Timor served no useful purpose, he said, and the item should be removed from the Committee's agenda.